

WASHINGTON (NWS) -- The following is a transcript of a videotaped message from Secretary of Defense Donald H. Rumsfeld to members of the U.S. Armed Forces and to Department of Defense civilian employees:

Great crises are marked by their memorable moments. At the height of peril to his own nation, Winston Churchill spoke of their finest hour. Yesterday, America and the cause of human freedom came under attack, and the first great crisis of America's 21st century was suddenly upon us. And we saw the memorable moments. Who will ever forget the display of national unity on the steps of the Capitol Building? People will long remember seeing and hearing the members of Congress spontaneously breaking out into "God Bless America." What a wonderful thing for the world to see, and what pride we can take in that moment.

So, too, President Bush's address to the nation will live in memory. He spoke for all of us when he showed his compassion and concern but also noted a quiet, unyielding anger among the American people. He offered a clear-sighted view of what needs to be done to prepare for the future.

As one of those working with him on his national security team, I can report that throughout the crisis, the president has been as commanding and impressive in person as he has been in his public addresses. As Americans, we can be proud of our president, our vice president and our leaders in Congress.

But I'm speaking to you now a little more than 24 hours after yesterday's attack. I must add that one of the finest hours of this crisis was here at the Pentagon.

For a long time to come Americans will take pride and feel gratitude for how nobly and professionally our military and civilian personnel have responded here at the Department of Defense. I left my office here in the Pentagon and went to the site of the attack minutes after it occurred. The scene was appalling, and even as I speak to you now, the human toll of this tragedy is being counted. Most in this building have lost friends and colleagues. We're doing all we can for the families of those who were killed or hurt. Our grief is beyond description, and our condolences go out to all of those who have lost a loved one.

But we have pride, too; pride in their service to country and to us all, and pride that in the morning, the flag was still there; the Stars and Stripes was over the wreckage to mark their place of honor.

Our gratitude is also all but indescribable for the firefighters and the police and the personnel from so many local, county, and state, as well as federal agencies who have assisted us. Their work and commitment have been an inspiration to me and to us all.

But in addition to telling you of America's pride in Defense Department personnel during the last 24 hours, it is my duty, as head of this department, to tell you that more, much more, will be asked of you in the weeks and months ahead.

This is especially true of those who are in the field. We face powerful and terrible enemies, enemies we intend to vanquish, so that moments of horror, like yesterday, will be stopped.

The task of vanquishing these terrible enemies and in protecting the American people and the cause of human freedom will fall to you, the men and women in the Department of Defense. I know we are ready. I know America can continue to count on your selflessness and courage and dedication to duty.

Let us never forget what this great institution is about. With its hallways filled with the pictures of Medal of Honor recipients and our country's great military leaders, this building is a place dedicated to the ethos of heroism. Heroes have gone before us. Here at the Pentagon yesterday, heroes were here again.

I know I am speaking to many now, especially those of you in the field, those of you who wear the uniform of our country, who will in the days ahead also be called heroes. I salute each of you for your conduct and commitment. And

without hesitation, I ask you now to stay the course in the challenging days ahead. A nation stands behind you.

I've been in public life for a long time, and if there's one lesson I have learned from it, it is this: Believe in the American people.

Believe in them especially when trouble starts, when the crisis comes. Believe in them to act worthy of their past, to act worthy of the future of peace and freedom they want for their children. Most of all, as you set about your dangerous work, believe in them to give you every support and give you their hearts and their prayers.

We extend our condolences, and ask God's tender mercies on our fallen comrades and their loved ones, and we ask His blessing and guidance as we turn to the work of defending this nation and preserving human freedom.